



Kitti Thonglongya with a group of international bird banders in Khao Yai National Park, Aug. 1968.



OBITUARY

KITTI THONGLONGYA

In the late afternoon of 12 Feb. 1974 **Kitti Thonglongya** died of a massive heart attack while he was resting following a casual game of badminton. He was only 44 and with his passing Thailand lost one of its two nationally known ornithologists and conservationists. It is not possible to mention Kitti without mentioning Dr. Boonsong Lekagul. A cleric would say that Dr. Boonsong and his wife are two of "Gods chosen people." They are of the breed of people that the world so needs and so rarely sees. Dr. Boonsong is a man of many dreams and Mrs. Lekagul with her business and financial acumen sees that his dreams come true. Those of us who through the years have enjoyed Boonsong's hospitality have watched his large and active household with amazement. He has fathered five sons all of whom are doctors or biologists of many specialties, but these have not been enough. Many other young people have felt the kindness of these two remarkable people and Kitti was one of these for he had come into the household in 1951. Ever since then Boonsong had been his inspiration and benefactor. Boonsong's well stocked table is always open to guests and I have often dropped in for lunch to see some new shy face serving the rice or drinks and upon query would learn that he had noticed the child in some farm or on some beach and thought that she or he looked in need of some help so he had brought the child home to feed and teach. I doubt if Boonsong himself knows how many such youngsters he has helped.

It was in 1957 that I first met Kitti, as a young man fresh out of college (he graduated from Chulalongkorn University in 1954 with a BSc. in Zoology). He was in charge of Boonsong's large museum of bird and mammal skins. He knew these better than I know the palm of my hand. He was the son of Yukiang and Ob Thonglongya and his father was employed by The Express Transportation Organization in Bangkok. Borne on 6 Oct. 1930 in Bangkok, Kitti is survived by his mother, two brothers and a sister.

In October 1961 Kitti was employed by the U.S. Army Component of the SEATO Medical Research Lab as a Medical Research technician in the department of Entomology. He became interested in the ectoparasites of birds and mammals and received training under Dr. Harry Hoogstraal at the Navy laboratory in Egypt. He retained this interest until his death, for at that time he was collecting parasites of bats, supported by a grant from the U.S. Army R. and D. command. In 1966 he transferred to the newly created Applied Scientific Research Corporation of Thailand as curator of vertebrates in the National Reference Collection, and took over the work of the Migratory Animals Pathological Survey in Thailand which was being relinquished by the SEATO laboratory. He continued in this research, ringing thousands of birds throughout Thailand. Most of these birds were captured by netting and mist nets take many bats as well. Kitti became interested in these mammals and was describing new forms in co-authorship with Dr. John Edwards Hill of Britain at the time of his death.

Kitti was a taxonomist, heart and soul. He had a keen mind with a remarkable memory for details. He could quote data from obscure references and if you queried him you would find that they were correct. He was outward and argumentive and loved to write, and most of his English speaking friends found themselves correcting the odd English in his papers and helping him in every way that they could. He just had so much on the ball that you wanted to help him.

I am an ecologist and came into conflict with him over his taxonomic methods. To him specimens had to be collected and described and catalogued. When we tried to get him to look at their ecological attributes he was confused. For example in January 1968 while ringing swallows that had been collected at night in a marsh at Bung Boraphet, Nakorn Sawan, in north central Thailand, he found in his hands a new species of swallow. A beautiful thing with striking yellow eyes and eyerings and a long delicate racquet tail. This he subsequently named *Pseudochelidon sirintarae* in honor of H.R.H. Princess Sirindhorn Thepratanasuda, the second daughter of H.M. King Bhumiphol Adulyadej. All that he collected he killed for museum specimens. To the rest of us

these are just wraiths from the night. I tried to get him to ring one or two and to release them so that we could see how they flew or how they fed, but he could not understand this. Such was his dedication to taxonomy.

As his interest in and studies concerning bats developed Kitti began to find new species and new distribution records within this poorly studied group in South-east Asia. Then he came to me excitedly in the Fall of 1973. He had found a new bat in a cave in north central Thailand, a bat so strange and so tiny that it must be a new family as well as a new genus and new species. Biologists scoffed; one didn't find new families of mammals in this day and age. He enlisted the aid of Dr. Edwards Hill and he too became enthusiastic about this strange creature and was studying it at the time of Kitti's tragic death. When all of Kitti's specimens were sent to him for further study and comparison with the collections of the British Museum, yes, it really is a new family. Dr. Hill has since described it as *Craseonycteris thonglongyai* of the new family CRASEONYCTERIDAE.

Kitti Thonglongya was a tribute to the science of biology and to Thailand. He is missed.

H. Elliott McClure

